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THE SPONGES OF PARAISO NEARSHORE FRINGE REEF, COZUMEL, MEXICO. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 44: 508. 1999:- Although sponges as a group are an easily recognisable life form, in ecological studies the identification of individual species of this phylum can be problematic. The objective of this study was to identify and describe the sponge species of the Paraiso nearshore fringing reef off the island of Cozumel, Mexico. A survey of sponges living within an 80m x 40m permanent study site was conducted using underwater video. Sponge tissue samples were also collected. A field guide based on morphological characteristics was compiled describing 42 different sponges, representing 9 orders, 18 families and 21 genera of the class Demospongiae.

Comparing the results of this study with earlier descriptions of the diversity of this sponge community indicate the importance of correct sponge identifications for accurate evaluation of changes in reef community structure. The results of this study suggest that regional identification guides are necessary for life forms such as sponges that have a plastic morphology that can be dramatically affected by environmentally induced variables. □ *Porifera, taxonomy, species list, reefs, biodiversity, Cozumel, Mexico, field guide.*

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